



Creating an Information and Analysis Unit

Gdynia, Poland

Background

In the early stage of the transition, Polish local governments rejected the strong control of planners over development policy. However, the evolution of the free market in Poland convinced officials of the need to reintroduce planning and regulation in local and regional development policies. Local governments realized that these new planning and regulatory methods must be based on the dynamics of the free market and balanced with the needs and interests of the local citizens. The City of Gdynia (population 250,000) faced a major obstacle in preparing city development strategies: the lack of current and appropriate information on the city's economic and physical condition. To overcome this, the city developed a database of demographic and economic information.

Innovation

In early 1995, the city began to develop a database that would enable city development policy to be guided by analysis of the local economy. The city established a small unit within the Economic Policy Department to develop and institutionalize analytical capacity within the city administration. Two local economists were hired to work part time with the city staff as joint leaders of the economic analysis team. The team surveyed city and non-city sources to develop baseline data and prepared a work plan for collection of data covering 1989 to 1994 based on these findings and according to needs expressed by a user group. Real estate and business information was collected through mail, telephone, and face-to-face surveys, some of which were conducted by a local research firm. Using the data collected, the team analyzed economic trends occurring in Gdynia and the surrounding region and developed projections for the next five years. The analysis examined changes in variables such as economic productivity, investment patterns, and profitability by form of ownership; growth sectors in the emerging private sector; trade patterns; population growth trends; and employment, land, and building utilization patterns. Based on the analysis, the team recommended a strategy through which the City of Gdynia could institutionalize the data collection and analysis process to be used in strategic planning. The team also conferred with all participants in the city's strategic planning process to identify training needs.

Results

The data collection and analysis took place over a one-year period. By the end of the year, a considerable database had been developed, and the city began publishing monthly statistical reports. A difficulty encountered was that the city staff who were members of the analysis team were not able to fully participate in the analytic aspects of the project. This was due to both a lack of appropriate training (neither were economists) and time limits. As the city staff developed the database, greater demands were placed on them to produce informational reports and brochures, limiting their time to work directly on the economic analysis. In future, the local economic institute will carry out this task and provide data to the information unit, thereby institutionalizing the activity at a reasonable cost. The overall result of the innovation is that the city has significantly increased its base of information to be used for decision-making, promotion, and project assessment. As a result of these activities, the city now recognizes the need to collaborate with other cities in the region to produce a database of regional information.

Summary

To overcome a lack of current and appropriate information on its economic and physical condition, the City of Gdynia established an information and analysis unit and developed a database of demographic and economic information. By the end of the year, a considerable database had been developed, and the city began publishing monthly statistical reports.

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